

staying connected

a publication designed for alumni of Catholic full-time volunteer programs

brought to you by the St. Vincent Pallotti Centers

Volume 6, Number 1

Spring 2004

Staying Connected to ... **VALUES** ... the post-volunteer challenge

The values we treasure not only reflect how we were brought up and by whom, but also how experiences and other people have changed us. For volunteers, values tend to take an individual shape as a result of the volunteer experience. In some cases deciding to volunteer is the first chance people have to stand up for their beliefs, despite criticism or incomprehension on the part of loved ones. And who can say that the volunteer experience isn't life altering in some way; that the work, the people, the place etc. don't in some way open his or her eyes? Of course the road to becoming your own person, and feeling comfortable with your choices, your values and your truth continues long after the end of your time as a volunteer.

After the volunteer experience, when volunteers return to their old environments they see things with new eyes and at times can initially feel disoriented. Many formers grapple with how to integrate values such as simplicity, social justice and community into "normal" life, i.e., job, income, possessions, church, community etc. With family members and old friends possibly predicting the endurance of a volunteer's change in values to be short-term (*It's just a phase!*), and the dominant culture not affirming his or her values, integrating personal values can be challenge for a former volunteer.

And not surprisingly, the question of how to pass those values onto the next generation then becomes a common issue as former volunteers think of marriage and having children. Perhaps, it is only "in the real world" that volunteers begin to question more deeply what they stand for and how they are going to live it out.

In this issue of Staying Connected we explore and reflect on the common challenge our values present to us as former volunteers.

See the results to the values survey of former volunteers: www.pallotticenter.org/surveys/valuessurveyresults.htm

FAMILY FUN OR FAMILY FEUD? VALUE SHIFTS AND FAMILIES

Oftentimes, completing a volunteer service program means reinsertion back into family life in a new way, especially for volunteers who need some transition time before making the next move in life. Whether it means living with parents for the first time in years or simply facing your loved ones after a long time away, the beginning period of post-volunteer life carries with it the task of renegotiating family relationships (which we do all the time).

Given many former volunteers cite a shift in values as a direct result of having performed volunteer service—in the form of a deeper appreciation for some values and/or a letting go of others—it is understandable that the homecoming can cause everyone involved a certain amount of stress. Assessing and being true to one's values in the context of home and family can be difficult. For some volunteers, their return home may involve a continuation of deepening family relationships that blossomed in new ways during the volunteer time. For others however, homecoming may bring with it feelings of being rejected and/or misunderstood by loved ones (and/or having loved ones feel rejected and misunderstood by you!). Upon first returning home, some of these elements may be present in addition to a multitude of other relationship dynamics.

For the returning volunteer and their families, what might be some of the underlying issues? The volunteer may be:

- grieving a loss of the volunteer lifestyle and all that it involved
- feeling unsure about the future and what is next

Continued on page 2, see *Family Fun or Family Feud?*

SHARING VALUES WITH THE YOUNGER GENERATION

Former volunteers who responded to our email survey overwhelmingly said they were *very interested* (84%) in sharing their values with the next generation. Another 12% said they were *somewhat interested*. So here are some background ideas and suggestions drawn from research for how to do it effectively.

Background

Values are important even though politics has made the term controversial, as in "family values". Also, some school systems have avoided teaching values either out of misplaced respect for diversity or for fear of being sued for promoting values somebody might consider wrong. But let's be brave and consider ways of developing your own values and sharing them with the younger generation.

We here use the term "values" to refer to beliefs embraced by persons old enough and sufficiently mature that they are free from childhood's naivete and independent of pressures from parents or peers. Values are beliefs that a person has thought about, understood, freely chosen from among alternatives, and then put into words, deeds and lived out consistently over time. In this strict sense, small children don't yet have their own thought-out and self-chosen values. Children do have preferences: as the adage says, "As the twig is bent, so grows the tree." So, in this issue of *Staying Connected*, we use the term "values" to refer primarily to a grown-up's convictions. But our focus is on how to pass these values onto children, how to encourage the inclinations of our precious twigs, if you will.

Continued on page 2, See *Guidelines*



- trying to figure out how to live out his/her values in the post-volunteer life
 - feeling "out of place" back in the home environment—feeling misunderstood by friends and family who have not shared directly in the volunteer experience

The recently returned volunteer's family may feel:

- joy that the volunteer is home again
 - that the volunteer has changed and is not the same person
 - criticized or judged by the volunteer who espouses a lifestyle that seemingly rejects their own

Clearly, these are not the only issues that may be at play, nor are they prevalent in all situations. However, for the many formers who do describe something similar, we would offer you the following thoughts:

-BE GENTLE with yourselves and others. In times of transition and change, there will be a certain amount of stress that just is part of the package. Take it slowly and be as gentle with yourself and others as possible by recognizing the need for this space and time of transition.

-LAY LOW It is OK to just let yourself remain in solitude for a bit. Many people may want to see you and to reconnect with you. Schedule these reunions at a pace that feels comfortable to you. In addition, your mind, body and spirit will need some time to adjust to all the changes.

-GRIEVE THE LOSSES Leaving a volunteer program means ending a certain chapter of your life and starting another. In endings, there is grieving to be done before a new beginning can really blossom. Take the time to grieve and to be grateful.

-SHARE YOUR STORY Face it, not everyone will want to hear about your volunteer adventures, and that is OK. Tell your story to those who really want to hear about your experience and don't hold it against those who don't.

-LISTEN TO THEIR STORY As you know, you are not the only one whose life has changed in the last year or so. Take the time to ask your friends and family how their lives have changed since you have been away. What is happening in their lives is just as valuable and important as yours.

- STAY CONNECTED Find ways to continue processing the shift in values you experience. Be in touch with other formers and talk with them about common experiences.

The work of integrating the lessons of your volunteer experience and the values that they revealed to you begins upon your homecoming and lasts a lifetime. Your relationships are the context for that integration to happen.

We are heartened that your passion for service, justice and human connectedness will continue to flow into the relationships that surround you.

Further Resources:

Join the Network of Former Volunteers by emailing formervolunteer@pallotticenter.org. By joining this network you can request information about former volunteers in your area.

From Mission to Mission www.missiontomission.org offers reentry retreats and resources for former volunteers.

Author Kaela Volkmer, MSW is the volunteer contact at the Pallotti Center in Washington, DC. She served as a Jesuit Volunteer in Chile and also worked for Jesuit Volunteers International where she facilitated reentry retreats. You can contact Kaela at kaelavolkmer@pallotticenter.org

Guidelines For Passing On Values:

Know your own values. This is the first step in sharing your values with others. For example, when you have a clear understanding of what you value, be it non-violence or simple living, then you can compare how games, toys, tv shows, household purchases, political decisions and your own behavior stack up against and contribute to these values. Similarly, if you don't think about and know where you are going, any road will take you there (to nowhere-ville). But if you do know where you are headed, many roads can take you there.

****Activity:** Make up a list of 12 activities you care about and then rank order them based on importance to you. Write down when you last did each. Put an 'M' next to each activity your Mom would have had on her list. Put a 'D' next to any your Dad would have had on his list. Think about and then discuss your results with a friend or partner.

Values are more caught than taught. Expectations, even when not directly discussed with children, can be a powerful motivator and tool for sharing values. In schools, for example, where faculty and parents expect children to behave and do their homework, and convey this expectation, children typically rise to the occasion. When the adults have low expectations for the children, they usually fulfill those as well.

****Activity:** Make a list of five expectations you have for the children you live or work with, whether about their picking up after themselves, contributing somehow to the group, praying or whatever. Then, next to each expectation, write down one action by which you, the family or school reinforces that expectation.

How is as important as What. How you share values is as important as what values you share. The process (how) is as important as the content (what). For example, if a parent or teacher wants to teach children the value of "respect for others" and mistakenly does so by talking at the children in a dictatorial manner, or by giving them a homily in an authoritarian style, then *how* the adult teaches, namely in a domineering manner, actually contradicts the intended message: respect for others.

****Activity:** Recall a time when you spoke or worked with a child to reinforce a particular value. Evaluate the extent to which the way you did it, the how, supported the value you were trying to share.

The teachers' or parents' actions speak louder than words. The more explicit and obvious the actions, the stronger the message. This is because the message is packaged in a real-life, emotion-laden, multi-sensory and personal actions.

****Activity:** Put on the living room coffee table an attractive photo album of family members and friends, or, put in the classroom a colorful photo album of the school's children, perhaps their baby pictures and/or photos of classmates doing diverse activities. This gives a clear and daily message that family members and the students are cherished and are bigger than we see them at any one moment. These explicit messages complement the more unspoken, implicit expectations.

Choices lead to stronger decisions and values. Thoughtfully presenting children with some alternatives can engage the children's mind and heart. It also gives them the message that they matter and are capable of making their own decisions.

****Activity:** Ask children or teenagers to remember their Christmas gifts (or teachers or classmates) and identify which is their favorite. Then ask them to explain why. This process educates the children in how to evaluate choices and know where their heart is. It also helps children be better able to express their values to others.

Participation develops values. Helping children to personally participate in value-clarifying activities is a key for developing their values. Youths who engage in value-related activities are learning, by using their imaginations and by physical movement.

Continued on page 3, See Guidelines

~ Spirituality ~

The search for the discovery of God's transforming presence in our lives

Living simply as a volunteer takes discipline.
Living simply for a lifetime takes a spirituality.

Spirituality and simple living are two values which today's former volunteers are working to develop. In response to a recent survey, the majority of formers told us that during their volunteer experience their values shifted specially toward these two. Today, this focus continues. Every one of the 271 respondents said he or she was currently working on developing some particular value, with the two most frequently cited being spirituality and simple living.

That this is a struggle is suggested by the fact that the majority of formers also said they see themselves as counter-cultural, either "very" (26%) or "somewhat" (55%). Today's consumer culture, infected with the "affluenza" of accumulating things and exaggerating self importance, rarely mentions the needs of neighbors. This makes it challenging for formers to live out their values. So perhaps it would be helpful to revisit some underlying principles which support a spirituality of simple living.

Some formers can happily base their simple living in the tradition which sees Jesus as poor to the point of being born in a stable and who, as an adult, preached detachment from worldly goods (Matt. 6: 19-21) and also clearly gave priority to the poor (Matt. 5:3). On the other hand, some formers may note that he also ate with the wealthy tax collectors (Matt. 9:10) and allowed the woman at Bethany to anoint him with expensive oils (Matt. 26: 6-12). These are actions, however isolated, which upset and challenged his disciples' to go beyond mere frugality and find a deeper understanding.

A second and perhaps more profound approach begins by recognizing that conversion is the core of Jesus' teaching. It suggests we need to live with the conviction that all of us, as one family, are dependent on divine mercy and called to a life of intimacy with God. That relationship empowers us and compels us to respond to the needs of the neighbor and to the community. Conversion then is readiness and urgency to respond. In Paul's words: *The love of Christ urges us on* (2 Cor.: 5:14). This responsiveness is based on the recognition of the intrinsic value of all of God's children regardless of their wealth or poverty, a theme consistent with Jesus' actions, mentioned above.

Spirituality then is the life long effort to make our actions consistent with priorities and values. Simple living, then, is primarily the struggle to always give priority to our relationships with the Other and others. Secondly, simple living is making sure our use of things serves, supports and furthers our relationships with Christ, the neighbor and creation.



Former Volunteer Sightings for FLORIDA



Jacksonville/Gainesville

*L'Arche Harbor House in Jax is an intentional community for people with disabilities and their assistants; volunteers are needed>904-744-4435, larchfil@aol.com *Heartworks Restaurant, is a funky vegetarian restaurant in the Five Points neighborhood in Jax>904-355-6210 *Marywood Retreat and Conference Center is a beautiful center that offers group, planned and individual retreats>904-287-2525, info@marywoodcenter.org *St. Augustine's Catholic Student Center in Gainesville serves as the student center for UF, but has many many more ministries as well>www.staugustine-uf.org *Payne's Prairie south of Gainesville - Bolen Bluff Trail off of Route 13 is especially scenic.

Tampa/Orlando

*Metropolitan Ministries serves the homeless in the Tampa area, and needs volunteers>www.metromin.org *St. Peter Claver Church in Tampa, St. Paul's, Holy Family and St. Josephs in St. Pete are all favorites with formers *Volunteers needed at the Franciscan Retreat Center in Tampa>813-229-2695 www.alleganyfranciscans.org/franciscancenter.htm *The Salvador Dali Museum in St. Pete has the largest collection of Dali paintings in the world> www.salvadoralimuseum.org *Catholic Volunteers in Florida's office in Orlando has a staff of formers> www.cvf.org *St. Margaret Mary Parish in Winter Park recommended by formers>407-647-3392 www.stmargaretmary.org *San Pedro Retreat Center in Orlando>407-671-6322 www.sanpedrocenter.org

South Florida

*Schott Center in Cooper City has a very welcoming and moving liturgy for the deaf and handicapped>www.schottcommunities.org *St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Miami is recommended by formers>305-274-6333 *Corpus Christi in Miami is a diverse parish promoting the formation of base communities>305-635-2031 corpuschristi@earthlink.net *St. Mary's Cathedral in Miami has a mix of ethnic ministries>305-759-4531 www.cathedralofsaintmary.com *St. Agatha in Miami is urban, w/ 30 base communities, serves FIU, many parish groups and ministries>305-222-1500 www.stagathaonline.org *St. Cecilia's in Ft. Myers is another place where formers go>www.saintceciliass.org *Volunteer at ECHO in Ft. Myers a Christian non profit dedicated to ending hunger>www.echonet.org

Pax Christi USA is the national Catholic peace and justice movement, and has over ten groups throughout Florida www.paxchristiusa.org Pax Christi USA Young Adult Forum contacts in FL: Gainesville- Johnny Zokovitch at 352-271-6941 or johnnypcusa@yahoo.com Miami-Anthony Vinciguerra at 305-206-8332 or paxchristimiami@yahoo.com St. Augustine- Paul Villavisanis at 904-794-7595 or teachenglish73@hotmail.com Pax Christi Florida holds a spring retreat each year. Past retreat facilitators have included Megan McKenna, Fr. Daniel Berrigan, Fr. John Dear, Rev. Jim Wallis and others: Contact Johnny Zokovitch (info listed above) for information.

Thanks to the Catholic Volunteers in Florida staff, current and former volunteers for your help in compiling these resources

Guidelines, continued from page 2

****Activity:** Next time you volunteer, take your child with you and then listen for the child's questions which will inevitably arise: Why don't those people have any food? Alternatively, present children with a moral dilemma, e.g., a paper mill employs the town's people, but pollutes their water supply. You're the mayor; what do you do? Have youth debate all sides of the conflicting viewpoints. This exposes them to others' views and helps the children become better able to critique their own choices.

Withholding judgment gives values a chance to grow. Teens and adults get into trouble by jumping into things without thinking. Values require the ability to withhold judgment, to deal with ambiguity and not decide or act until sufficient information is available. Impulsiveness is a powerful enemy of values.

****Activity:** Next time you, as an adult, come upon a scene which at first appears to be child-caused chaos, whether at home, in school or elsewhere, withhold your negative judgment ("This room looks like a pig pen!") and instead say to the child(ren), "Tell me what's happening here." This approach gives the child a chance to think, give honest information or a creative answer, and not have to be defensive. Is the chaos actually something else? Ambiguity, once unpacked, can help promote values both in children and adults.

Conclusion. Hopefully these activities and guidelines will be useful to those of you who have or are thinking of having children, and for educators.

Author Andy Thompson, PhD is the director of the Pallotti Centers and is the author of various books and articles on child development. You can contact Andy at andythompson@pallotticenter.org



The Saint Vincent Pallotti Center
for Apostolic Development

415 Michigan Ave., N.E.

Washington, DC 20017

Change of Address Requested

Non-Profit Org.
Presorted Standard
U.S. Postage Paid
Washington, DC
Permit #3188

In this issue:

- Guidelines for sharing values with children
- Value shifts and how they play out in families
- Spirituality of simplicity
- Leadership and values



Staying Connected is printed on recycled paper. Please do your part by passing on your copy to another former volunteer or by recycling the paper. Thanks!

Leaders and Volunteers Take A Big-Picture Approach to Sharing Values



Leaders are not only excellent at sharing their values, they also tend to have a special way of communicating their values to others. Authentic leaders go beyond self-centered story-telling and instead deal with the bigger picture of how the parts interact with each other and with the whole. This approach is part of what makes leaders attractive to their followers.

Stories can be either helpful or limited vehicles for sharing your values

Know anyone who speaks mainly on the story level? They often narrate personal events which can be entertaining, full of emotion and, at their worst, sound something like this: "She goes . . . , and so I was like . . . , and then he goes" etc. This approach, whether the speaker is young or old, invites little more than one-word responses: "Wow!" "Awesome!" "Dude!". The narrator's details make it difficult for anyone to see the forest through the trees. Remember when you first returned home from volunteering and had lots of stories to report? Your challenge was to get beyond the details and tell your story so your listeners could know what you learned, the patterns in how the experience changed you or others. Once beyond the story's details, you then had a better chance to share your values with listeners.

Leaders use patterns, processes and systems to share their values

Know anyone who is good at calling attention to patterns in what they experience? Here is someone who gets beyond details, can see the big picture (the forest), and can help the rest of us recognize it. They key in on how the parts interact with one another, be they members in a family, co-workers in an organization or voices in a choir. They have a knack for seeing not only how the parts link together but also how the system as a whole interacts with the larger outside networks.

Volunteers develop big-picture values typical of leaders

The values for which formers most frequently said they gained an appreciation during their volunteer service were "simple living," "spirituality," "social justice" and "community." The volunteer programs' intent in promoting these values is not simply to help individuals be frugal or pious in isolation from other people. Rather, the intent in each value is to encourage a way of interacting with others and to impact others' lives; i.e., *live simply so others may simply live*. This includes the most frequently cited value formers said they were working on today, "spirituality." This religious value is the search for the glue that holds us all together and promotes intimate connections within ourselves as individuals, with others in a community and with the Other, the really big picture, God's loving mercy.

Conclusion

The values you are developing suggest that you have the vision of a leader, because these values signify an awareness of the "bigger picture" and of human connectedness. The values that formers speak of, spirituality, simple living, social justice and community, compel you to move beyond yourself, and like great leaders, to live them out in the service of building a world that is a bit more holy and human for all of God's creatures. We are glad that you will be leading the way for future generations!

Staying Connected: Assisting in the continued formation of former lay volunteers.

The St. Vincent Pallotti Center for Apostolic Development **Editors:** Andrew Thompson, Dani Clark Scano and Kaela Volkmer **Production Editor:** Dani Clark Scano
Advisors: Kristelle Angeli, Anita Saira Moravski and Maureen Cunningham. **E-mail:** stayingconnected@pallotticenter.org **Webpage:** www.pallotticenter.org

These materials are copyrighted. ©2004 Volume 6, Number 1 The Saint Vincent Pallotti Center

Unauthorized reproduction is prohibited. The Pallotti Center hereby gives permission to reproduce all or any of the contents of this publication so long as proper credit is given to The Saint Vincent Pallotti Center and so long as reproduced materials are distributed gratis.

Mission: To promote lay volunteer service that challenges laity, clergy, and religious to work together in the mission of the Church. Our goal is to support lay volunteers *before, during and after* their term of service. **Location:** Local Pallotti Centers are in Boston, Paterson, NJ, St. Louis and Oakland, CA.

The National Office is in Washington, DC. **Inspiration:** The Centers take their inspiration from Saint Vincent Pallotti (1795-1850) who believed passionately in the laity, in each person as being an image of God and as called to be missionary.